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ABSTRACT

A study examined the impact of gender on administrative decision making. Do males and females make different decisions? The study tested 56 practicing and aspiring administrators in a graduate program. Of these, 36 were women and 20 were men. The study presented the participants with 15 scenarios often encountered by school administrators. The study participants were given a choice of options to use as solutions to the situations, as well as the option of writing in their own solution. Additionally, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was used in the study to produce a four-letter profile of the study participants. The study revealed a clear difference between the decision-making process of aspiring and practicing administrators. Aspiring administrators very rarely wrote in their own solutions, whereas practicing administrators often wrote in additional solutions, usually qualifying one of the options listed. The practicing administrator's decisions reveal a pattern, while the aspiring administrator's decisions tend to be more random. Differences in decisions do not appear related to gender. The dispositions of the administrators identified by the Myers-Briggs Type have considerable impact on decisions. (Contains 21 references.) (KDP)

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GENDER AND ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION-MAKING

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GENDER AND ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION-MAKING

The popular and professional literature across fields is replete with books, articles, and even studies, suggesting that males and females lead differently; and beyond merely leading differently, that the ways in which females lead are more consonant with the best thinking about the ways organizations should be led (cf: Helgeson, 1991; Cohen, 1989; Loden, 1985; Tannen, 1990; Gilligan, 1982; Josefowitz, 1980; Pounder, 1990; Shakeshaft, 1987; Bell and Chase, 1989). At the same time, an equally vigorous and compelling literature argues that there are few, if any, differences in the ways in which males and females lead (cf: Bartol and Wortman, 1974; Charters and Jovick, 1981; Day and Stogdill, 1972; Dobbins and Platz, 1986; Donnell and Hall, 1980; Grimes and Sloan, 1984; Harlan and Weiss, 1982; Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Lannon, 1977; Quantz, 1983). Further, from this perspective, differences found between females and males in ways in which they operate are either insignificant or may be more appropriately attributable to accommodations females must make in order to operate in leadership positions (Eagly, et.al, 1992).

Shakeshaft (1989), in an examination of research and thinking about gender and leadership in educational administration, has argued that we need more

research on "women in organizations," "women studied on their own terms" (328), and what this may mean to and for existing theory, and examinations of "the impact of gender on both male and female behavior (328)." Her consideration of the stages of development through which research on women in educational administration has passed lends foundational substance to her recommendations and has implications for the current inability to resolve or reconcile differences in answers to the question of whether females and males lead differently. For one thing, we may not yet have sufficient knowledge about the impact of gender on leadership **behavior** irrespective of whether or not there are differences in gender-related characteristics.

In the spirit of Shakeshaft's recommendations, the present study sought to examine the impact of gender on administrative decision making, i.e., to see if males and females made different administrative decisions and/or made those decisions differently.

PROCEDURES

Initially, the subjects selected for the study were all (during one semester) of the students enrolled in three core graduate classes in educational administration

who were preparing to be certified as school administrators. The 37 students, 23 females and 14 males, from seven different school districts who met this criterion were all teachers, with various years of experience, working at different levels of schooling (elementary, middle/junior high school, and high school). Coincidentally, a new program for the advanced preparation of practicing school administrators was begun that semester with 19 individuals, 13 female and 6 male. They included superintendents, principals and central office administrators from six different school districts, with a wide range of experience. Among the 19, all levels of schooling and prior teaching were represented. They were added to the study population at almost the same time as the initial group was contacted. They were included as subjects because they were accessible and appropriate to the intent of the study, and would add to the number of subjects involved. At the time there was no serious consideration given to the possibility that this group would differ in its responses from the other group in any significant way. Nevertheless, this group was designated "practicing administrators;" the other, initial group was designated "aspiring administrators." And the variable of aspiring and practicing administrators was added to the analytical procedures.

Subjects were asked to respond to an instrument containing 15 scenarios depicting frequently encountered school problems, i.e., situations to which

administrators must respond by making a decision about the action they will take. The problems were drawn from administrative and management literature and the reported experiences of teachers and administrators in the field. An initial set of scenarios was field tested by a group of school-based people for face validity and to ensure they could stand up to a reality check.

The problems involved a wide range of situations from making hard decisions about whom to hire, rif or give a greater, less desirable load; to dealing with staff conflict and inadequacies;
to deciding between policy and students' futures; to defining parent and community involvement; to ways to deal with an increased workload. Four different ways (options) for dealing with the problem were listed below each problem and the subjects were asked to choose the option that **best** represented what they would do if they were in this situation. They were told that several options might be seen by them as good and appropriate, but that they were to choose the best one. If none were appropriate, they were directed to write in what they would do under option e, Other. The options identified represented a range of equally appropriate choices from which a reasoned administrator might choose. They differed in terms of the aspects of administrative decision-making that were pitted against one another, e.g., deciding oneself vs. shared decision-making; maintaining vs. changing;

managing vs. leading, and were designed to solicit what they would do. The options were reviewed by the field test group which affirmed that they represented alternatives real administrators had made or might make.

In addition to the scenario instrument, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was administered to each subject. The MBTI is a widely-used, validated inventory which defines preferences in the ways in which individuals perceive and make judgments. It results in a four letter profile of sixteen types, with four major combinations of letters that define perception and decision-making. The instrument uses factors other than gender to define differences in decision-making. Thus it was included as an additional yardstick against which to measure the findings to be derived from the scenarios, one which would not be dependent on the gender of the respondent.

The responses of each subject to each problem were listed and cross-listed by total group, gender, MBTI profile, and school level. Where options were written in they were categorized in terms of whether or not they were truly different from one of the options offered to the scenario. It the response was truly different from one of those options it was listed separately and such responses were compared where appropriate. If the response was not different from an option provided, it was grouped with the option it matched. The focus of the

analysis was on patterns of responses, and whether or not patterns emerged which could legitimately be defined as gender-specific, i.e., not attributable to another variable.

Almost immediately, a clear, discernible difference group differences in the responses of aspiring and practicing administrators emerged. The variables were then used to analyze the responses of each of these two groups.

FINDINGS

Aspiring Administrators

Aspiring administrators tended to choose their responses from among the options provided. There were only three instances in which aspiring administrators wrote in an option rather than choosing from among the options identified.

There were no differences in the patterns of responses of aspiring administrators to the problems on the basis of gender or level of school which could not be explained by and attributed to Myers-Briggs Type. Where

differences in responses appeared to emerge by gender, analysis by Myers-Briggs Type all but erased the differences. The majority (50% or more) of males and females with the same Myers-Briggs Type chose the same options. Respondents were thus more alike by Myers-Briggs Type than by gender. Similarly, any differences which appeared to emerge on the basis of level of school, i.e., the responses of elementary school teachers appeared to differ from those of high school teachers, were eliminated when analyzed by Myers-Briggs Type. Those elementary and high school teachers with the same Myers-Briggs Type tended to choose the same options.

Analysis of the responses of aspiring administrators by Myers-Briggs Type resulted in discernible differences in terms of the four primary profiles (SJ,NF,NT,SP). The major differences were even more sharply defined by one letter of the profile, T or F, the letter of the profile related to how one makes decisions. The majority of T's chose the same options; the majority of F's chose the same options. And these options were different in 11 of the 15 scenarios. Gender was not a factor in the choices made. The majority of male F's and female F's chose the same options. The majority of male T's and female T's chose the same options.

Practicing Administrators

All of the practicing administrators wrote in responses to some, and many wrote in responses to almost all, of the scenarios, in preference to choosing an option identified. This "decision" most immediately differentiated them from aspiring administrators who almost always (except in three instances) chose from among the options listed. Despite having written in responses rather than choosing identified options, what they wrote in almost invariably matched one of the identified options. The only differences involved the addition of qualifiers and explanations about what they had thought about in reaching the decision drawn from their past experience.

Surprisingly, there were no differences in the patterns of responses of practicing administrators to the problems on the basis of gender, school level, or Myers-Briggs Type, and the group was defined by the very similarity of their responses to the scenarios. Unlike aspiring administrators, the responses of practicing administrators were not distinguishable by Myers-Briggs Type. Practicing administrators who were T and F were as much alike in their responses as aspiring administrators had been different in their responses.

There were patterns in the nature of the decisions practicing administrators made which were not evident in the decisions made by aspiring administrators.

Practicing administrators tended not to go against rules and policies and to make decisions which would be consonant with those rules and policies. Even as they sought ways to circumvent the rules or policies, e.g., find a way to allow the honor student to take his semester exams, they would not directly violate policy, e.g., not suspend the student. Practicing administrators defined community and parental involvement in narrow terms and only on their terms, and chose, when given an option, not to share decision-making power with teachers, parents, or the community.

CONCLUSIONS

The study sought to consider the impact of gender on administrative decision-making to see if males and females made such decisions differently. The study relied on a limited, but captive population of 37 practicing and 19 aspiring administrators involved in graduate education, and used their responses to administrative decisions to represent the phenomenon under study. The conclusions to be drawn from the study are limited by the nature and size of the study population and by recognized limitations in the methodology chosen for studying the question.

The sample used was one of convenience rather than randomly drawn or representative. In analyzing some variables then, e.g., MBTI, the number of cases was too small to allow for comfortable generalization.

The nature of the question being studied presents methodological problems for researchers. Since the question raised relates to whether or not male and female administrators make decisions differently (in practice), the most appropriate way to answer the question methodologically would seem to be to see the actual decisions they make. Self-reports and responses to scenarios, as in this study, while simulating such decision-making, may not be the same as actual behavior. However, the practical problems of gathering such data in situ make it difficult to do and raise yet another set of problems. Interestingly enough, the methodology used in the study did distinguish practicing from aspiring administrators. Nevertheless, it is recognized that the responses given by the subjects in the study may not be identical to those they make or would make in actual practice.

In light of these limitations, the conclusions are, and should be considered, highly tentative and related solely to the population studied. They are seen as suggestions for possible answers to the research question and guides to future research, rather than definitive answers.

Given the suggestive results of the study that differences in decisions do not appear to correspond to the gender of the decision-maker, what accounts for reported differences (in the literature) in the way in which male and females make decisions.The reported differences may be related more to differences in Myers-Briggs preference than to gender. When the responses of aspiring administrators in the study were examined superficially, they appeared to be gender-related. Under closer scrutiny, this relationship did not hold up. Rather, the responses were more definitively related to Myers-Briggs preference. It may be that such preferences are more important to the decision-making process than gender.

Without denying that males and female administrators may do some things differently, e.g., females may operate more democratically than males, as reported by Eagly, et. al (1992), If the responses given by the practicing administrators are reflective of what they do in practice, dispositions they may have--whether by gender or preference--may be overridden by the norms and demands of the position they hold. In other words, either because those chosen for the positions are disposed to so do, or because the role itself imposes on the individual, there may be a tendency for practicing administrators to make decisions "like an (all other) administrator." The overriding tendency for practicing administrators in the study to choose the same responses,

irrespective of differences among them, including gender and Myers-Briggs preference, lends strong suggestive evidence for such a conclusion, a possibility that Eagly and Johnson (1990) and Eagly, et. al (1992) raise in their meta analysis of studies of male and female principals. If this finding bears out in future studies, it would suggest that administrator behavior may, for its understanding, owe more to role theory than gender theory.

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